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OO RUEHAST RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHTA #1147/01 1700629
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 180629Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2634
INFO RUCNOSC/OSCE POST COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 001147

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/RPM, SCA/CEN, AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [OSCE](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [KZ](#)
SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - EMBASSY INPUT FOR OSCE HUMAN
DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

REF: STATE 60838

¶1. (U) This cable constitutes post's input on Kazakhstan
democracy and human rights concerns for demarches in
preparation of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation
Meeting (HDIM).

Democracy and Political Rights

¶2. (SBU) When Kazakhstan was selected as 2010 OSCE chairman
at the November 2007 OSCE Madrid ministerial, Foreign
Minister Tazhin publicly committed that Kazakhstan would
undertake several democratic reforms. Specifically, Tazhin
said that by the end of 2008, Kazakhstan would amend its
election and media legislation taking into account ODIHR
recommendations, as well as liberalize registration
requirements for political parties and media outlets. The
government has thus far taken some steps toward implementing
these commitments, including establishing working groups,
with civil society and opposition participation, to discuss
amendments to the election and media legislation. Though
much work remains, there is more than sufficient time for
Kazakhstan to follow through by year's end -- and we have
been repeatedly assured by the government that it will do so.
We should continue to stress that failure to implement its
Madrid commitments would undermine Kazakhstan's effectiveness
in its role as OSCE chairman.

Freedom of the Press

¶3. (SBU) While Kazakhstan's diverse print media includes a
plethora of newspapers sharply critical of the government and
of President Nazarbayev personally, the broadcast media
largely maintains a pro-government line, with very limited
coverage of the political opposition. The government
apparently blocked several opposition web-sites in late 2007
for uploading recordings of embarrassing conversations
between senior government officials (which were likely made
by Nazarbayev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, who was
recently convicted in absentia of plotting a coup). Access
has not been restored to all of these sites. In April 2008,
the English- and Kazakh-language web-sites of Radio Free
Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) became inaccessible to
customers of Kazakhtelecom. The government did not admit to
actively blocking the RFE/RL sites, which became accessible
again beginning in early June. Journalists and editors
remain subject to criminal penalties, including prison time,
for libel, although criminal prosecutions are rare and no
journalist has been jailed on libel charges in recent years.
We expect that future amendments to Kazakhstan's media law
(see above) will ease, though not eliminate, these criminal
penalties.

Freedom of Religion

¶4. (SBU) We remain concerned about a package of amendments to Kazakhstan's religion law under consideration in parliament which appear aimed at asserting greater government authority over so-called "non-traditional" religious groups, such as evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas, and Scientologists. While the latest text represents an improvement over the original version, it retains a number of problematic provisions, including ones which would create a distinction between large and small religious groups, limiting the rights of the latter. At the urging of the USG and our like-minded partners, the government submitted the original version to ODIHR for review. ODIHR sent its comments to the Kazakhstanis on June ¶10. We have been reassured by senior officials that they will take into account ODIHR's recommendations in the final version of the amendments.

¶5. (SBU) There has recently been a significant increase in negative media coverage of "non-traditional" religious groups which appears to have been orchestrated in part by the government, perhaps to lay the groundwork for the religion law amendments. A long-running land dispute in Almaty oblast between local authorities and a Hare Krishna community remains unresolved; we should continue pressing for an equitable resolution.

Trafficking in Persons

¶6. (SBU) We should commend Kazakhstan's progress in combating trafficking in persons, which resulted in Kazakhstan being

ASTANA 00001147 002 OF 002

upgraded from "Tier 2 Watchlist" to "Tier 2" in the 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report. Over the past year, Kazakhstan improved its efforts in convicting traffickers and sentencing them to prison time, in addressing official complicity in trafficking, and in assisting victims. We want Kazakhstan to continue its forward movement on all fronts -- prosecution, protection, and prevention.

Child Labor

¶7. (U) While Kazakhstani law prohibits the worst forms of child labor and the government is engaged in a number of efforts to combat it, NGOs report that child labor remains a serious problem, particularly in cotton and tobacco production, branches of agriculture in which large numbers of migrant workers from neighboring countries are employed.
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